

Khamba Thoibi is the most loved and popular legend of Manipur. The story of Khamba and Thoibi occurred during the reign of Chingku Telheiba, King of Moirang (one of the then seven Kingdoms of Manipur) in about 1302 A. D. The author had produced this ancient story depicting the life and customs of Manipur which prevailed in early 14th Century as a Ballet. It was so much appreciated that she has now written the whole story in verse. She has been able to capture the life and colour of the period in this book. This book also includes other short poems which she has written on Manipur.

Other Works.—Ambapali a historical novel published by Asia Publishing House

“Congratulations to Mrs. Raina for writing a great book which we hope will circulate throughout the world.”

—Times of India.

“Ambapali emerges from the author’s pen as a restless spirit *par excellence*. The craft of writing, the wealth of ideas to reflect upon, and the consistent and sustained interest maintained throughout, make it, the most ambitious work on the subject.”

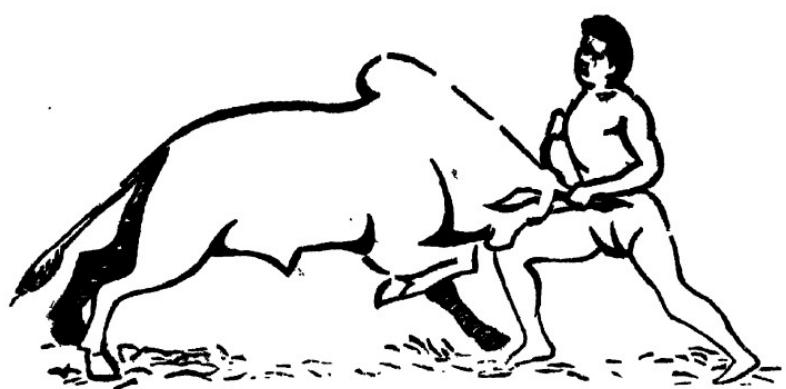
—Bhavan’s Journal.

“Songs of the Temple Bride”, with a foreword by Mr. Humayun Kabir, India’s Minister for Scientific Research and Cultural Affairs. He says “The exotic quality of her poems will appeal to those who seek the flavour of the orient in English verse Her poems will help to interpret the East to the West”.

Dr. Verrier Elwin says “These songs breath the very spirit of India, whose ancient philosophy and history come to life in them. Indian readers will look at their own traditions through the window of this gifted woman’s verse ; readers from other countries will get a glimpse not easily obtained elsewhere of India’s essential values”.

Khamba
Thoibi
And
Poems on
Manipur.

Vimala Raina.



BULL FIGHTING

PRINTED AT THE GOVERNMENT PRESS, MANIPUR 1963.



TIGER FIGHTING.

Khamba Thoibi



KHAMBA THO'BI DANCE.

By :-

VIMALA RAINA

INTRODUCTION.

Khamba Thoibi is the most popular and the most loved legend of Manipur. Like other legendary stories of our Puranas the story of Khamba Thoibi too is the main theme running through a labyrinth of stories and incidents interconnected with semi-historical and semi-mythological trends. But unlike the Puranas there is no old and authentic book of Khamba Thoibi. The story has been verbally passed on from generation to generation and thus the story has become very long and complicated with verbal repetitions for about two thousand years. I found there were some differences in the version of the story but the dance of Khamba Thoibi, which the people believe the couple danced in the temple two thousand years ago, has remained intact ; for I found uniformity in this dance wherever I saw it performed.

Though Manipuri Dance is famous as one of the four traditional classic dances of India, few people know about Manipuri Drama. I have been interested in drama as a writer, director and producer. Several of my plays received good comments from the Press when they were staged. I credited myself with a good sense of direction and production till I came to Manipur. But when I saw some of the plays produced here by Manipur Dramatic Union and Rupmahal, I was amazed at the talent of Manipuri actors and the flawless direction with which the plays were presented. Their ingenuity in production and stage crafts specially in Manipur Dramatic Union plays, inspite of possessing a poor stage in a very poor hall, is remarkable. But they do not have many good plays of their own. They mostly stage Bengali plays translated into Manipuri. The dances of Manipur were presented every where and received good applause but in drama there was the difficulty of language. They could not speak Hindi fluently and

so inspite of their beautiful portrayals of character the dialogues could not be well spoken and Manipuri would not be understood outside Manipur. I, therefore, thought of composing a Dance Drama of their most popular legend of Khamba Thoibi, so that through dance and music they could show their dramatic talent to the world.

Khamba Thoibi Nritya Natya (Dance Drama) was first shown on the 1st January 1960 before Shri Humayun Kabir, Union Minister for Scientific Research and Cultural Affairs, India. He says :—

"I was delighted to see Khamba Thoibi at Manipur when you produced it as perhaps the first full scale ballet in the Manipuri form of dancing. The whole conception and execution was excellent and some of the dancers were obviously highly talented and extremely well trained.

I personally think that the Manipuri style is the most graceful form of Indian dancing and I wish you every success in your attempt to develop and popularise it."

It was staged at Delhi on 6th and 7th November 1961. Some of the comments received were :—

Times of India :—"Khamba Thoibi is a Manipuri tale of delicate charm. This ballet of unusual charm has been composed by Vimla Raina. The most appealing aspect of the show was the care and patience with which the music, dances, costumes and settings had been brought together to create authenticity. Every scene was realistic that one felt transported to the magic land of Manipur in the medieval days of the King of Moirang. The market scene and the water-sports on the lake were quaint and beautiful.

Mrs. E. S. Nasset, New Delhi, 13-11-1961 :—

"I would like to express appreciation and congratulations to Mrs. Vimala Raina and her company for the excellent performance of "Khamba Thoibi." Mrs. Raina and her assistants did a beautiful job of direction and staging. The drama unfolded rapidly without the repetition and slowness sometimes so apparent. The characters moved with flowing grace and interpreted their roles with sensitivity and skill.

We would enjoy seeing this company perform again. It was one of the best we have seen in India."

Khamba Thoibi was again staged before Ambassador John Kenneth Galbraith.

Baltimore Sun of America says :—"Ambassador John Kenneth Galbraith is inclined to agree—The Manipuri Dance managed and directed by Mrs. Vimala Raina staged a beautiful performance of Khamba Thoibi.

It is a Dance Drama based on a story of royal life in the 11th century. He believes Khamba Thoibi would win acclaim in any America theatre."

May 2, 1962, Mrs. J. K. Galbraith says :—

"I shall never forget the beautiful dancing in your ballet. The story was so lively and the whole thing moved along with grace and drama..... We wish this kind of ballet could come to the United States. It has colour and vitality and good appeal to Western audiences. Your ballets were easy to understand as well as charmingly done."

Khamba Thoibi has been produced as Dance Drama many times and never failed to delight the audience. I later got a letter from A. I. R. Gauhati requesting me to convert the

Dance Drama to a kind of Opera suited for broadcasting in All India Programme. This gave me the incentive to write the tale of Khamba-Thoibi in verse. I have taken the most salient points of this very long story and tried to bring out the most beautiful and appealing elements which could be put on the stage, within two and a half hours. I am happy that I shall leave behind me this story so dear to all, in English verse with a Manipuri Version, of the same, for the people with whom I spent five years midst the peculiar charm of Manipur.

I had written many poems here and I have added the poems inspired by Manipur in this book. I not only leave behind, I also take with me these stories and these pictures drawn in my poor words to remain with me for ever. I shall also try through this book to let others see and know, what I have seen and known.

Imphal

VIMALA RAINA

the 18th January, 1963.

Khamba
Thoibi

Vimala
Raina

KHAMBA THOIBI

I shall try and bring back to you
The lovers of two thousand years
Thoibi, the princess of Moirang
And Khamba, who knew no fears.

Once a Minister of the King's Court
Named Puremba had gallantly fought
To save Chawba, chief minister, his friend
So when due to a curse he saw his end
Approach him he sent for Chawba and said—
“I am dying, please promise that you shall wed
My daughter Khamnu to Feiroijamba your son
And look after Khamba, my days are done
Do the engagement now so I die in peace.”

Chawba :—“I give you my promise your worries cease
I give my son's hand to your daughter, see
Your Khamba shall be like a son to me
So burden not your heart with fears
It's a time for rejoicing, not for tears.”

But the evil spirits cursed and cried.
“Man shall get nothing that fate has denied
Promises are not destiny, all shall forget
What happens now, after sun set.”

It happened exactly as the spirits had said
All oaths were forgotten when Puremba was dead.
Khamnu and Khamba lived unknown
In poverty and sorrow alone, unowned.

Poor Khamnu mothered Khamba with nothing but love
 And prayers offered daily to gods above.
 One day as Khamnu cried and prayed
 At the temple she thought the gods were swayed.
 For as she arose and opened her eyes
 She saw her betrothed Feiroijamba beside
 Her offering flowers to God and so
 She cried out to him as he turned to go.

Khamnu :— “Have you forgotten that fateful morn
 When you put your hand on mine
 And pledged to hold it for ever
 As a vow divine ?
 Can you not see my eyes, my tears
 Don’t you remember my face ?
 Oh ! please don’t turn away from me
 Oh ! spare me this disgrace.”

Feiroijamba :—“Say you I ever saw you before ?
 And took your hand in mine
 Would I not have remembered you
 Or do you take me for a swine ?
 Shame on you ! Away with you !
 I have met such as you before
 Who tried to ensnare many a youth
 And many lies with innocence swore.”

Khamnu :— “Oh no ! Oh no ! Oh no ! Oh no !
 Hush ! do not say any more
 Forget I ever spoke to you
 Forget you met me before
 But do not say or ever repeat
 The words you uttered just now
 And I shall never cross your way.
 I swear before God, I vow.

Go away, far away, see not my tears
 Hear not my piteous cry
 To hear you say these words to me
 Oh God ! I wish I could die !
 Oh ! go away, please, go away
 Why do you thus stand and stare ?
 Why do you look on my shameful disgrace
 Oh ! it is so hard to bear.
 Oh ! go, go, for God's sake go,
 May the Gods forgive you, go !
 But never say those words again
 Oh no ! Oh no ! Oh no !"

So Khamnu distraught in mind and heart
 Thought she must leave her home and part
 From the Big Red Bull, her family's pride
 She must leave this valley and go and hide
 Her shame, her poverty behind the hills
 For time the old friend often kills
 The pain which fresh memory like fresh wounds
 Pains all the more, but with memory swooned
 She shall start afresh her dreary life
 And learn to bear with hard faced strife.

She packed up her belongings and went to the shed
 Where the Bull groaned loud being unfed
 She embraced him and putting her head on his neck
 She said "Oh ! Bull, our hope is wrecked
 I cannot feed you, it breaks my heart
 To see you in hunger so I must part
 From you who were our joy, our pride
 Go now in the forest greens abide.
 I shall go too, so I let you loose
 To appease your hunger and your home choose.
 Forgive me Bull but helplessness

Was never the chooser and distress,
Is to be borne not moulded to choice
It's destiny that speaks, we have no voice.
Fare-well ! Fare-well ! go now and be free
And roam the forest and find some tree
With rich leafy boughs by some stream.
And I shall lose myself in a dream
That some day perhaps the Gods may relent
And release all the grief in my heart pent
Fare-well ! but bless us before you go
Bless us and forgive us it's our woe
To part with you, see Khamba cries
I'll hush his sobs with my sighs
Good-bye ! Fare-well ! Good-bye ! Good-bye !"

x

x

x

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So days dragged on heavy and sad
For Khamnu but Khamba now a lad
Of seventeen summers, handsome, bright-eyed
Brought sunshine for Khamnu ; hope and pride
Waited in her heart and a stray smile
Now often rested on her lips for a while.

Khamba cut the wood which Khamnu sold
Which gave them coarse bread if not gold.
A Naga Chief gave them shelter and he
Loved them as his own and waited to see
Khamba grow up handsome and strong
Daring and courageous to right the wrongs
Which his own kinsmen had done to him
He taught him how to fight and swim
Against the current of whimsical fate
And how to love honour but never let hate
Poison the mind and weaken the strength
Of righteous courage. He told at length
Of brave men and of brave deeds done
And how through courage lost honour was won.

Little Thoibi was now a maid of fifteen
With innocent beauty rarely seen
And Nongban favourite knight of the King
Who sought her hand would often bring
Pretty gifts for Thoibi, though he had other wives
A man who played with many lives.
Rich and handsome though advanced in years
He pleased the King and had no fears
Of being rejected for Thoibi's hand

As none in Manipur could withstand
 His cunning and his physical strength
 The court's champion with abundance.
 So it was more or less assumed that he
 Soon some day shall wed Thoibi.

But Fate is ever lying in wait
 To dismantle expectations, and to take
 A different turn as the story ends
 All human will and striving bonds
 And breaks before powerful destiny
 A hope is a hope, not certainty.

One eve when Princess Thoibi went
 To the market with her maids and friends
 To buy what her maiden mind fancied
 She was met by Nongban who courtesied
 And presented her with a costly shawl
 Thoibi's innocence unmindful of all
 Nongban's plans and aspirations to win
 Wealth and rank if she accepted him
 Took the gift nonchalantly and soon forgot
 What the giver of the gift had meant or sought.

Her young heart thrilled with the market place
 She moved with happy radiance on her face
 When suddenly she heard a cry and saw her fall
 A maid fair, lovely, slender and tall
 Carrying a heavy burden of dry wood
 Pushed by some uncouth youth who stood
 Staggering unbalanced with too much drink
 So Thoibi was touched as she saw her sink
 Down with eyes in which hope was dead
 Thoibi ran to her and said.

Thoibi :— “Who are you fair one with eyes so dark
 With pain buried deep in tears
 Oh ! tell me what fate has extinguished the spark
 Of your large eyes dry with fears.
 How came you to be so lost forlorn ?
 Your face belies your trade
 Your beauty looks so sad and worn
 What cruel fate forbade
 You joys of life ? Your delicate form
 Is too tender for the burden it has borne.
 Oh ! how it pains to see these eyes
 Dry though they weep,
 To see this fair and haughty brow
 Bowed low with pride turn meek.”

Khamnu :— “Whose could be this caressing voice
 To raise hopelessness with love
 It almost makes my tears rejoice
 And believe that Gods above
 Do see, do hear,
 Perhaps do care,
 For the love in this voice for me
 An unknown tattered dusty maid
 Surely a dream must be.”

Thoibi's Friend :—“She is the princess of Moirang
 Lose all your fear, speak all you can.
 Come now, tell us who are you ?
 And you shall then have nothing to rue.”

Khamnu :—“Oh ! Princess forgive me, if I've failed
 To pay you due homage, you are so kind
 And I so unused to kindness thought
 It must be some raving of my mind
 I am Khamnu, but my father's name
 Must be buried with him.”

I feel shame to blot his fame
 And let my poverty dim
 His name, his prestige, with my black fate
 Do not question me please, but this I say
 I too have seen better days. I wait
 And live for my younger brother who may
 Some day regain his honour, his pride,
 For him I live, for him I strive
 For him I'd even beg with a bowl
 For he is the only light
 In the darkness of my soul."

Thoibi :— "I do not know how I feel in my heart
 The pain which your heart does suffer
 Come, you take this gold chain, this shawl
 Is for your younger brother."

Khamnu :— "Oh no ! Oh no ! Oh no, no, no !
 We live by our toil, not alms,
 Forgive me moon-faced princess for I
 Have been blessed with all your charms."

Thoibi :— "Oh ! let not such thoughts ever enter your mind
 It's my love I give not alms
 It's a gift of friendship, come be my friend
 And scathe all your alarms.
 Come, live with me and bring your brother
 The palace grounds are wide
 I'll provide a little home for you
 So you may be by my side."

Khamnu :—(Sobbing) "Oh ! beautiful, godly, lovely princess
 Tell me it's not a dream
 To lose all and then to get so much.
 All at once, unreal seems,

I do not know what to say and how
 To thank you, with words so poorly dressed
 To come out before you. At your feet
 My pride now seeks redress.
 Forgive me Princess, the poor have nought
 Else but pride to save
 And even kindness sometimes so hurts
 Poor pride it forgets to behave
 Pardon me, for one so starved
 For love soon loses belief
 In love's existence, and so its truth
 I find so hard to conceive."

Thoibi :—“I know, I know, though I do not know
 How I know, I seem to feel
 You belong to a pattern of my fate
 Yet to be woven and revealed.
 Till tomorrow then, fare-well my friend
 Tomorrow shall bring you to me
 A strange impatience stirs my heart
 For what ? I cannot see
 Fare-well ! Adieu !”

Khamnu :—“Fare-well to you.”

Thoibi :—“Till tomorrow ?”

Khamnu :—“Yes tomorrow.
 It really seems
 Tomorrow may end all sorrow and I
 Am looking at truth, not dreams.”

The sun had set, the flushed warm sky
Was turning cold and grey
As Khamba awaited his sister's return
Anxiously scanning the way
Which led to the market place below
Where his sister daily went
To sell the wood he cut for her
As the day was spent.

But ere now she had always returned
Before the sun went down
He wondered what had delayed her to-day
And looked on with a frown.
The forests were wild and his passions fierce
Though only a lad of eighteen
He had the courage of lions in him
His body was muscled and lean.

Taut as if moulded of steel he stood
The twilight revealing his form
His sinewy limbs so smooth and tanned
Like a child of coppery dawn.
His forehead wide with unruly locks
His brow like his own bow arched
His eyes deep, dense, dark, intense
His lips now slightly parched
With the hot fiery breath which heaved his chest
As he stood lost in thought
And wondered what kept his sister from him
He looked of gods begot.

So lost was he in imagined fears
 That he did not see her ascend
 The path which led up to their hut
 Where she hurriedly went.

Khamnu not seeing him, called out to him
Khamnu :—“Oh Khamba ! Where are you ?
 Oh ! I could dance and I could sing
 For my dream is true.”

Khamba leapt from the mound with a tiger's grace
 And ran down the slope to Khamnu.
 He whirled her round in his embrace.

Khamba :—And said “I've been waiting for you.
 Oh ! sister mine how long you've been
 The birds and flowers are all abed
 As the red glow darkened and the eve turned blue
 My heart was filled with dread.”

She gave him the shawl the princess gave
 Which filled Khamba with joy
 And then she donned the golden chain
 Caressing it, a maiden coy
 With a smile on her lips, half happy, half sad,
 Full of remembrance and dreams
 So that when Khamba looked at her
 He heard suspicion's screams
 Echo and re-echo deafening his ears
 From the darkness of forest dense
 How had she earned this costly chain
 What had her absence meant ?
 His wild heart could not hold the rage
 Of suspicions ugly and dark
 His eyes bored into his sister's face
 As he cried out in agony stark.

Khamba :— “Is this the price of the wood you sold
 Or is this the price of your smile ?
 Is this the price of your shame made bold
 Or the price of passions wile ?
 Throw that away and tell me true
 What demon what madness had possessed you.
 Ah ! sister mine, has want at last
 Broken your pride and made you stoop
 To pick up trash and smile on it !
 I die of shame, we cannot recoup
 What once is dead. Your honour died
 Ah ! cursed me—Ah ! cursed me !
 I could not protect you with all my strength
 Weakness is stronger than strength I see.”

Khamnu :—“Oh ! No ! my brother, my only one
 I have come back with nothing undone
 This is neither the price of the wood I sold
 Nor the price of my smile
 Nor the earnings of shame made bold
 Nor of anything vile.
 This is the gift of Princess Moirang
 Who is kinder than gods divine
 She's beautiful as love and fresh as dew
 As warm as fresh made wine.
 As soft and kind as the moon
 This chain she gave to me
 And bade me go to her palace soon
 My dream will come true you'll see.
 This shawl she sent for you as a gift
 Oh Khamba ! my brother, my only one
 Her smile in a flask can lighten and lift
 Our burden, our woes are done.
 Tomorrow shall open for us her gate
 Tomorrow we too shall smile at fate.”

But learn you manners before we go
 And tame your wildness and learn the way
 Of gentle folks and courts and kings
 May the gods be merciful for you I pray."

And Khamnu smiled on him with love
 And brushed his hair from his forehead hot
 While he stood bent and meek with shame
 For what he'd said and helplessly sought
 To redeem his sin, oh ! how could he
 Ever doubt his sister, he fell on his knee
 And rubbing his head against her feet
 He cried out in agony of defeat.

Khamba :—“Ah ! how could I ? beat me, strike me hard
 Scold me, banish me out of your sight
 My dirty doubts so poisoned me
 My mind grew dark as night.”

Khamnu :—“Nay ! rise and embrace me as before
 How can I banish my hope, my delight
 Even harsh words and ugly doubts
 Are raised by love's own light.
 Oh ! my Khamba, in your rage I saw
 Only your love, I crave
 For nothing more than love from you
 The love you always gave.
 Come, I'll cook, you have some rest
 Tomorrow we leave our forest nest.”

Khamnu went in but Khamba sat
 Beneath the pines and thought
 About the princess of Moirang
 Who had of a sudden brought
 Back the light of hope for them

To live again and see
Their lost honour return to them
As the sun brightens gradually.
He thought about her face and form,
His emotions rising in a song.

Khamba :—“One whose heart is full of kindness
What must her face be like ?
One whose words are so sweet
What must her voice be like ?
Tomorrow must I go and see her face
Tomorrow shall I hear her voice
Tomorrow shall I dare my fate
And let my heart rejoice.”

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Princess Thoibi and her maids
With Khamnu's love new found
Go singing and laughing to Loktak lake
With joyous freedom unbound.
For this day no man was allowed
To enter the Loktak lake
And if he was so foolish and bold
His life would be at stake.
Their hearts soaring with emotional wings
In blissful ecstasy they sing.

"The water of the Loktak is deep and blue
The rippling waves beckon and wait for you
The cold breeze scented with lotus flowers
Whispers messages from some bowers
Where your own love waits for you
Where your own love waits for you !
For every maid there waits a lad
For every lad a maid
But love is deep as the blue Loktak
So turn back if afraid."

They laughed and swam like flowers without root
But as Thoibi heard soft music of a flute
She stood still entranced as she heard the tune
Her face pale and beautiful like the moon.

Thoibi :— "Ah ! hush ! such melody on a flute
I've never heard before
In sooth the tune does sway me as though

It has lain in my heart's core.
 I feel as if I've heard this tune
 And known it all along
 And yet I know this cannot be
 For I do not know this song."

It was Khamba on a raft playing his flute
 He did not know the law
 No man shall enter Loktak to-day
 And as Thoibi's face he saw
 He forgot his flute, forgot to see
 Whither he went or how
 He kept on gazing at her face
 Entranced, enraptured and now
 His raft collided with the fishing net
 Which for the princess had been set.

The maids shouted and rushed to him.
 They caught him and scolded him proud and prim
Maids :— “Hey ! Who be you ? audacious fool !
 To dare to come and break
 The princess's net, girls bind him quick
 And let him meet his fate ”

Khamnu :—“Oh ! Princess forgive him I beg, I pray
 He is my brother Khamba
 He does not know the royal way
 Nor the laws of the land and ah !
 I'd thought I'd teach him by and by
 And tame his wildness raw
 Forgive him this time for it was I
 Who forgot to tell him, he saw
 Us here and so he came
 Oh ! Princess I beg, I pray
 “Never shall he thus come again
 Or ever cross your way.”

*Thoibi :— “Oh ! No, No, there is no need
 To be harsh to him I know
 He is a stranger to our lands
 And he’s your brother so
 We’ll let him go. But Khamnu,
 I thought from what you said
 He was but a little boy
 Or so my fancy led
 Me to believe. He is so ..
 So ... but never mind
 You don’t rebuke him now Khamnu
 But be good and kind
 And ask him if...Oh ! I do not know
 But tell me did he play
 That tune on his flute I heard just now
 As he came this way ?”*

But Thoibi waited for no replies
 Possessed with a kind of fear
 She tried to think and control herself
 Her thoughts confused, her feelings clear.

‘Is it madness that possesses me ?
 Oh ! no ! it can not be !
 And yet, and yet, this madness
 Makes me remember, makes me see
 Lost visions. I can’t believe my feelings
 Yet what I feel I cannot hide ;
 The strains of his flute vibrate in my heart
 His stately form, his forehead wide
 His proud bearing, the look in his eyes
 His hair, and his lips, his proud face ;
 He’s like a picture in my mind
 Which Time could not erase.’

KHAMBA THOIBI

Thus was she lost in a world profound
A world she had known, lost and found.
And Khamba stood bound with happy ease
As if bound in new found peace.
Unmindful of all hazard, unmindful of law
His attention centred on what he saw
He felt as if for this he was born
Even before birth his love foreshown
To her who stood before him like his soul
To make his earthly being whole.

So lost was Thoibi in her thoughts
So oblivious of all that she forgot
To tell the girls to release Khamba
And Khamnu nervous and distraught
Pleaded for her brother again
Her voice full of painful strain.

Khamnu :—“Princess, oh kind princess please,
Please do tell them to release
Khamba and I promise, I solemnly swear
Never again shall he thus dare.”

Thoibi :— “Oh ! No—but—oh !—I just forgot.
Release him girls, for he knew not
The law. Free him before Nongban comes
You know his anger mercy shuns.”

Girls :— “Go young tiger, go your way
You didn't even have a word to say
Or ask forgiveness, have you no tongue ?
But your flute your pardon sung
Go, ere Nongban sees you return
Or his wrath for life you'll earn.”

Khamba went back as he had come
Playing the flute and Thoibi
Turned and followed him on the bank
Till she could hear, till she could see.
While Nongban watched with jealousy
Rising in his heart for this lad
Who could thus attract Thoibi
His wrath made him almost mad.

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To day there is a wrestling match
Between teams of Yuvaraj and the King
He shall be declared court's champion, who can
The former champion Nongban, win.
Wrestling had begun, the King's champion
Nongban with his stature and strength
Was wrestling with Yuvaraj's man
With an air of confidence.
There was a big crowd watching the match
And the two rival teams
Were bucking up and cheering the wrestlers
Midst laughter, shouts, and screams.

One from the crowd :—“Ah ! Nongban wins and Yuvaraj
Has lost again the match
Look how he paces and thumps his fist
While Nongban tries to catch
The princess's eye, look how he gloats
Showing off his muscles and brawn
To impress the princess who seems to be
Indifferent, her attention drawn
By handsome Khamba who stands nearby
Meeting Nongban's challenge with his fiery eye
Which Nongban's pride with cold scorn meets
But hush ! now listen, the Yuvaraj speaks?”

Yuvaraj :—“Is there no brave youth who can challenge Nengban
If there be one, let him come out and stand.”

Khamba steps forward but his sister Khamnu
Has run to his side and tries to pursue

Her brother Khamba not to go and fight
Nongban who is full of strength and might.

Khamnu (whispers):—“No, Khamba no ! do not fight Nongban
Whether you win or lose he always can
Ruin your life, he is crafty and strong
He can bear no rival to live long.”

Khamba :—“Oh ! sister mine ! I know not fear
And honour to me is much more dear
Than snivelling life, bar not my way
For I must prove my mettle this day
And rise in glory or with courage die
Come, bless me now and let me try.”

Yuvardi :—“Ha ! who is this who wants to fight ?
And who be you who bar his way ?
Come out brave lad, and fight Nongban
Come out ! come right out, I say.”

Poor Khamnu was silenced, who could disobey
A royal command, she could only pray
To the gods to give her brother strength
While proud Khamba measured the length
Where Nongban scoffingly stood and said,
Nongban :—“Who is this unknown youth who is led
By his destiny to his death ?
I could blow him with my breath !
Nongban fights nobles, this foolish youth
Is beneath me, his dress and manner uncouth
Speak plainly of his lowly birth
His challenge is but an object of mirth !
Let some real noble or true knight
Come and challenge Nongban’s might.”

Yuvaraj :—“Yehah !” Yelled the Yuvaraj full of rage.

“This lad will be knighted by my grace.

Fear you Nongban this little lad ?

Really it’s too bad, too bad !

Come and bring me the sword I knight
This lad to-day for my delight.”

So Khamba was knighted

And the fight began

Like rising waves different murmurs ran

Some applauding Khamba and some Nongban

While Thoibi stood up pale and wan

And tried to comfort Khamnu and prayed with her
To let Khamba win, her heart astir

To see the courage of this youth

Face all hazards like pure Truth

Faces the might of powerful lies

And all wile treachery and strength defies.

Nongban had the strength, but Khamba a will

A will and the frail looking might of skill

Which his foster father the Naga taught him

And so his courage did help him win

Nongban, the onlookers cried out in applause.

Crowd :—“This lad has won by the grace of God

Surely a lad like him who could win

The mighty Nongban powerful as sin

Must be an incarnation of some god

Blessed in special by the Lord.”

So the people cheered and the Yuvaraj smiled

With proud joy, but Nongban riled

Bit his lip and thought of a plan

To rob Khamba of glory if he can

Divert people’s mind, raise doubts and fears

By a prophecy uttered like the seers.

But the King taken aback with Khainba's skill.
King :— Asked "Who is this brave boy from the hills
 What is his name ? Whose child is he ?
 His bearing is proud and I can see
 Noble blood in his veins, go bring him to me
 For he shall from now our champion be."

His Chief Minister, Chawba, to Khamba went
Chawba.—And fondly said. "The gods had sent
 You to-day with their blessings it seems
 Come tell us your name as custom deems
 Then the King himself shall declare you a knight
 The youngest lad to gain this height.
 We are proud of you and to know that such
 Valour is bred by our land is much
 To make us feel proud of our land and race
 In sooth I do seem to know your face
 Who is your father, what is his name ?
 Never so young a son, got such fame."

But Khamba knew not his father's name
 For Khamnu out of sorrow and shame
 Had never spoken of their father to him
 And now she stood with her eyes abrim
 With tears, for often when Khamba did ask
 Their father's name it was a hard task
 For her to tell him the truth and say
 Why they were living this wretched way
 And that her betrothed had forgotten his vow
 And this very Chawba who asked him now
 Had forgotten even their father's name
 Had forgotten his loyalty and his fame
 And dusted off his promise like burnt ash
 His son had discarded her like trash
 And so she would stroke his forehead and say,

"I'll tell you your father's name the day
 You shall win back his honour and our pride
 Till then we must only wait and hide
 Our shame and disgrace ; but remember this
 We are high born." And then with a kiss
 She would seal his curiosity and bid him go
 To learn to be strong and wise and so
 Poor Khambu when asked his father's name
 Looked at her with his eyes full of pain.
 She kissed his tears and embraced his pain
 Then turned to Chawba with haughty disdain.

Khamnu :—“To-day I can proudly take the name
 Of one who had died with rich fame
 Of one who gave his life for his friend
 And had so nobly met his end.
 Of one who was forgotten and betrayed
 By the very friends whom he had saved.
 Yes ! to-day I can take his name and say
 The gods above still have their way
 Of righting wrongs, but I shall not
 Reveal his name to those who forgot
 The promises on his death-bed made
 And also how honest debts are paid
 Forgive me, Oh King ! my agony
 Has made a brazen girl of me.”

And while people wondered as Khamnu knelt
 Before the King a vibration was felt
 Whispering “Puremba, Puremba the knight
 Puremba, your minister and friend that died.”
 And Chawba at once cried out aloud
 “Puremba, Puremba to him I vowed
 To wed my son to his daughter Khamnu
 Oh ! cursed memory how can it be true

That I should forget them all these years
 "Oh ! my poor children" he said with tears
 "It's some magic some sorcery
 Some evil spirits which caused this to be."

And true this was, for the curse was to end
 When Khamba was strong enough to bond
 All evil pride and evil might
 Till poor unaided he won the fight
 Between good and evil, right and wrong
 To show all men true pride belongs
 To those who can win it, the moment had come
 The past fled fast, the fight was won.

Chawba asked his son Feiroijamba to kneel beside Khamnu
 And begged the King to bless them, for it was true
 He had pledged his son's hand to her years ago
 And now not a moment could he defer and so
 This was an auspicious moment to make amend
 For his broken promise to his friend.

Feiroijamba looked at Khamnu as she knelt by him
 And he recognised her at once his heart abrim
 With shame and repentance as he recalled how he
 Had denied having met her, he could see
 How she had looked at him shamed, appalled,
 When his eyes with some curse had been walled
 So he failed to recognise her, but the gods were kind
 For a girl such as her, he could never find
 And perhaps it was the voice of fate
 Which had whispered to him to wait and wait
 For this girl who was really born for him.
 The voice was clear, though his sight was dim.

But just as they were married and blessed by the King
 They saw Nongban swaying madly, with his hands ring

A little bell used in the temple shrine
 He posed to be bewitched by a spirit divine
 And murmured broken sentences to fill them with awe
 He made weird faces and they saw
 The Demon in him as he yelled with a cry
 "The Bull ! the red bull, he shall dry
 The waters of the heavens and disease will spread
 Till every one is on his death bed.
 The wild red bull which our forest roams
 Shall be the breaker of hearths and homes
 For he is possessed by a Demon who will
 Appear his hunger with his kill.
 Ruin, and destruction, disease and death
 Shall blast and blow off all your wealth
 And all your honour with your crown
 Shall roll in the dust on-bloody ground.
 But if some one can bind the bull
 And sacrifice him to the Demon, his hunger full
 The Demon shall go back and sleep again
 Your realm will then in peace remain
 Soon, soon, remember before fullmoon
 Fill his hunger or meet your doom.

He quietened and opened his eyes as if
 He had come out of a trance as stiff
 As death ; then relaxed and looked around
 As if he knew not what they found
 So awesome and threatening ! why with fear tense
 They looked at their King for their defence.
 And fear of the supernatural so strongly led
 The King to fear, that he said,
King "My people, you have just now heard
 The desire of the spirits and their word
 Must be heeded to. Who amongst you can
 Bind this wild bull, I'll reward the man

With wealth and honour, come who can save
Your King, your people, from the grave?"

Then Nongban looked round with sneering pride
And went to the King with a swagger in his stride
But Khamba leapt like a tiger and bowed
Before the King and he gallantly vowed
To bind the red bull, the people cried out
"Long live Khamba". Nongban was put out
But the King blessed them both and the people cheered
For they had abated all their fears.

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Nongban is now fighting the bull
For he has won the toss
And Khamba stands watching by the King
His eye keen as a hawk
To notice each slip, each vantage point
Which Nongban has missed and Oh !
The bull now charges with full force
And has him pinioned so
Between his horns that Nongban lies
With fear paralysed, out of breath
And Khamba kneels and asks the King's
Permission to save him from his death.
And when the King permits him to go
Like a flash without a sound
He leaps on the bull and tries to hold
On to him but the bull throws him down.
This gives Nongban the chance of his life
He runs away out of sight
Khamba rises and holds the bull
By his horns with all his might.

Crowd :— Villagers watching the fight cry out
"The coward ran away
While Khamba tried to save his life
He hadn't a word to say.
Oh ! Look-- Ah ! but the lad is brave
He just twisted in time
See how nimble he's on his feet
He's like some god divine."

Another :— "Hush ! the bull is mad with fury now
The lad is so tender and young

But he is trying to tire him out
 The bull has now begun
 To perspire ; see now his wrath is hot.
 He is mad with lust to kill
 He is now foaming at the mouth
 And his bloody eyes mean ill."

Another :— "Hey ! Khamba has succeeded to put the noose
 Round his neck, now he's trying to pull
 From behind the tree and bind him to it
 He gives him rope—But Ah ! the bull
 Jerked the rope away from his hands
 So suddenly that Khamba falls
 The bull is now pinning his head on him
 But hark ! his sister calls."

Khamnu ran down the slope and cried
 As the Bull came close she'd recognised
 It's their own Red Bull which Khamba fought
 He had turned mad and now he sought
 To kill Khamba whom he loved as his child
 He did not now know him, having turned wild.
 She called out to the bull as she ran
 And sobbing with grief to him she sang.

Khamnu :— "Oh ! you red one, you mighty Bull
 You, who were our pride
 Have you too forgotten me
 And little Khamba who used to ride
 Your back ere he had learnt to walk
 While you bore him gently as your own
 Do you not even recognise my voice
 See little Khamba has grown.
 Oh ! Bull, my own Bull, can't you see
 You fight your Khamba oh ! listen to me

Wait I beseech you, please hear my say
 Then do as you wish and have your way.
 I let you loose to fare better than us
 If you knew you would excuse
 It was our poverty that parted us
 I could not feed you, I let you loose
 So Bull forgive us our poor fate,
 Forgive and love us as before
 Let not your love now turn to hate,
 But love us even more."

While Khamnu cried out to him and wept
 The bull stood still and pricked his ears
 And then he turned his face to her
 And licked off all her fears.
 For he had in sooth recognised her voice
 And when he saw her face
 She had not changed, though Khamba had
 Grown to a man by His grace.
 He bowed his head and smelled Khamba
 And licked his forehead wide
 Khamba circled his neck and embraced him tight
 Then put his head beside
 The bull's and let his tears run down
 The bull's nose, who licked them and knew
 That he at last had found
 Both Khamba and Khamnu.

The bull was now docile as Khamba led
 Him to the King. He knelt and said—
 "I bring to you, Sire, my own red bull
 Spare him and take my head
 But he shall not be sacrificed my lord,
 Or by my God, you'll see me dead."
 The crowd cheered Khamba and jeered Nongban

In one voice they shouted and said,
Crowd :— "This bull is no demon as Nongban proclaimed
He is a god so let him be fed
With the best fodder of his choice
Khamba has won, our hearts rejoice
We came to fight a demon, a god we find
A god who is gracious, lordly and kind."

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Thoibi is weaving a shawl for Khamba
She's been weaving all the day
The sun has set on the Loktak Lake
When her maids bring a light and say.

Maids :— “Oh ! moon faced princess
For whom do you weave
Night and day
In a dream-like way
So lost in your thought
That you even heed not
If the day has turned to night
The smile on your lips lights the darkness it seems
For you do not even ask for a light.”

Thoibi :— “For him I weave who is woven in my heart
Who pervades my waking and my dreams
My thoughts, my smiles, my tears, my fears
And now the whole wide world it seems
Means only him, though I know him not
Yet I do feel I have known him long
I have not yet even heard his voice
Yet I seem to know the song
Which his heart sings to me.
How do I know all he would say
Yet I do seem to know
I feel in my heart I have met him before
Some where, so long ago.
I've loved him perhaps since the world began
I've loved him and Oh ! my friend
I've loved him before and I shall love
Him alone till the world shall end.”

Friend :—“Oh ! princess, the shawl is beautifully done
 May the gods bless him for he has won’
 Your heart so dear to all our hearts’
 But now come in, the light departs
 And look ! your father comes this way
 I wonder what he’ll have to say
 When he sees this shawl so fine.”

Thoibi :—(Whispers) “Ah ! fold it and to your ears confine
 My words yet, for I fear Nongban
 And he will now do all he can
 To thwart Khamba, his jealous eyes
 Are like the eyes of enemy spies
 Quick, hide the shawl, they come by this gate.”
Maid :— “I think they have seen it, it’s now too late.”

Yuvaraj :—“What is it maid you hold in your bands
 It’s like pure moon-light on the sands
 Who wove it ? Come now show it to us.”

Thoibi :— “I sire, it’s hardly worth a fuss
 I wove it to spend my idle time
 It’s really not as good or fine
 For you to like it.”

Yuvaraj :—“For me to like it ?
 Your modesty child
 Makes your innocence so sweet and mild
 But in sooth, it’s good enough for me
 I’ll wear it with pride for all to see.”

He took the shawl from the maid and said.
 “Oh ! it’s beautiful enough to be wed
 In, why my only precious one
 This shawl is really beautifully done.”

Nongban :—“May I suggest you wear it sire
 At the Arrow-shooting festival with state attire
 The land has not seen such weaving before
 And woven by the princess it'll all the more
 Befit the occasion and all shall see
 The beautiful weaving of princess, Thoibi.”

Thoibi :—“But it's unfinished yet father, let me weave
 You another one, better than this.
 One, more gorgeous, rich and fine
 A shawl like a rainbow's kiss
 This one is really too hastily made
 It has some flaws—But very soon
 I shall weave one like brocade
 And present it to you by this fullmoon.

Yuvaraj :—“As you wish child, though I fancy this piece
 So don't tire yourself, make it with ease
 For if that's not ready I'll wear this one
 Now come on inside, the day is done.”

So the Yuvaraj and Nongban went away
 And poor Thoibi felt her little heart sway
 With nervous fear, but this shawl was his
 Its every thread woven with the kiss
 Of her emotions, her love for him.
 No one and nothing could now dim
 Her desire to give Khamba this shawl
 She was prepared to face them all
 And declare her love, but destiny
 Was weaving what was yet to be.

Thoibi is sitting by the Loktak Lake
Entranced in a dream as she waits
To hear the sound of Khamba's flute
Which opens for her the gates
Of heavens, when she feels in her being
The ethereal melody of love
Flood her with waves of exquisite bliss
Blessed from Gods above.

The waters are wild, the wind is strong
The moon beams dance on the waves
But hours of waiting are not long
When every minute paves
The way to him ; for now in her life
Her hours and minutes belong
To him who holds her mind and heart
And makes each thought a song.

Thoibi :—(Sings) “The waves of the Loktak come rippling to me
As if they are sent by him
The breeze, the moon light all seem to be
Perfumed by his breath, abrim
With a wanting, a yearning and a thirst
Which has waited since the birth of time
When my eyes did see him first
In fathomlessness sublime.
But why does'nt he come ? , the moments run fast
It's getting dark and late
What could delay him ? surely not fear !
No ! nothing delays but fate !

Oh ! hush ! my heart, hush ! he comes
 His melody floats to my soul
 Coming across tumultuous waves
 To make my being whole.
 Oh ! he is coming ! These waters are wild
 With perilous rocks on the shore
 Oh ! gods, please keep him safe for me
 I do not ask for more."

As Thoibi saw Khamba perilous waves ride
 She rushed to the shore and nervously cried.

Thoibi :— "Oh ! why come you through this darkness wild
 What madness is this that defies
 The dangers of these gathering storms
 My heart throbs and sighs
 Oh ! perilous is the climb
 To the heavens which we seek
 I fear their depths sublime
 My heart with love is weak."

Khamba :— "I felt your heart was calling me
 Calling me with love
 I fear not the dangers of the storms
 I fear not the Gods above
 No power on earth can bind me
 Except the call of your heart
 To which I'm bound for ever, Thoibi
 Which even the gods can't part."

What could she say when all was said
 As they looked in each other's eyes,
 Their love enveloped and silenced them
 All thought was drowned in sighs.
 Sighs of fulfilment, sighs of longing

Sighing to merge their souls
 Closer, still closer, till they felt
 Melted in love's glowing mould.
 Shyly she gave him the shawl she wove
 He put it to his lips and smiled
 Then draped it round his shoulders
 And wrapped her in passions wild.

They danced to the symphony of their love
 Their breath in rhythm rose
 Their heart-beats in tune to their desire
 A desire which grows and grows.

He played to her, she sang to him
 Oblivious of all cares,
 They knew not that wile Nongban's eyes
 Were looking on them from the stairs
 Of the balcony facing the Loktak lake
 But perhaps his poisonous breath
 Did mingle with the air they breathed
 And made it tremour with death.

Thoibi suddenly shivered and looked
 Towards the balcony where he stood
 Like some ill omen, dark and grim
 Her heart leapt to Khamba, she turned to him
 And bid him go ere Nongban could
 Summon her father, she knew he would
 Poison his mind, his jealousy
 Could be ruthless and mean, he could see
 Her suffer and smile at her pain
 And yet a claimant for her hand remain.

Thoibi :—"Oh ! go, love, go ! for your life
 Is dearer to me than love

Go before he raises alarm
And I will try to shove
All honesty, all truth away from me
And lie a brazen lie
I know my father loves me so
Nongban cannot defy
My lies—I'll deny having met you here
I'll fill myself with lies
Go my love and have no fear
Thoibi is yours or she dies."

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To-day was the Arrow-shooting Day
A royal festival of the year
But Nongban's rage was bursting to say
That which filled Thoibi with fear
He was grinding his teeth with vengeance
And was thinking out a plan
To rouse the wrath of Yuvaraj
To madness if he can.

Nongban :—'I have seen the shawl coveted by Yuvaraj
Round Khamba's shoulders wide
And to-day when he comes to the festival
He shall not be able to hide
What they have hidden so far in their heart
For he shall tear apart
The misty veil of love from their eyes
And kill that wild upstart.
And then Thoibi shall be his alone
And he the only heir to the throne
For she was the only child they had
And they had no son to own
All this wealth and all this power
And Yuvaraj is a fool
Pompous and vain like a maiden
I can easily make him a tool
To banish Khamba from my sight
Then the world shall be for my delight.'

Crafty Nongban waited for Yuvaraj to come
And when the Yuvaraj came
He touched his feet in silent respect
And then started his game.

He stood silent and still and bowed his head
 As if in sorrowful thought
 When Yuvaraj asked the reason
 For his silence so deeply fraught
 He replied :— “My sire, I wish
 I had the courage to speak
 But the thought of your displeasure
 Silences me though I earnestly seek
 To stop that which may be too late to stop
 And then your dishonour, your pain,
 Will be for me so hard to bear
 For I'll feel I failed in my aim
 And my duty as your knight
 To protect your crown and name
 From turning to mud, but exalted sire
 I really burn with shame
 To say what I must before you say
 Though you may find it hard to believe
 Love and faith often hide truth
 But Nongban never deceives.”

Yuvaraj :— “Come ! speak out your mind.
 What burdens you ?
 Surely it can't be so bad ?
 Though your face does speak of tidings
 Which seem to be somber and sad.
 Come ! speak ! I give you my leave to say
 Whatever has silenced you
 On the happy occasion of this festival day
 Come now, the moments are few.”

Nongban :— “The words are harsh so prepare yourself
 Sire, for your daughter has slighted you
 And only for a mountain rat at that
 Believe me sire it's true.

The shawl you asked her to give you
 She has given to Khamba and now
 He wears it hidden next to his heart
 And they have made secret vows
 Without even waiting for your consent
 And this my loyalty to you resents."

Yuvaraj :—“What? it cannot be, it cannot be.”

Nongban :—“Ask her sire, if you believe not me.”

Yuvaraj :—“I shall, though I know it's some foolish thought
 Of a mind by ravenous jealousy caught.
 If this be true I swear I will
 By my own hands destroy and kill
 The germ which breeds disloyalty in my own
 By God! my kindness was not sown
 To grow discord, go send for Thoibi
 And I shall ask and myself see
 And by God if this be true
 Khamba shall have no life to rue.”

So Thoibi was sent for and when she was asked
 About the shawl she lied.
 She said the rats had bitten at it
 And that she had really tried
 To finish another, better than the one
 Her father the Yuvaraj had seen
 And to prove her words she laughed and said

Thoibi :—“Come father see it, I am keen
 To know what you think of this shawl
 It really has a better sheen
 For I wove it like brocade
 In a pattern rarely seen;
 But I'm sorry I could not finish
 The shawl to-day as was your wish.”

The Yuvaraj laughed "Now see Nongban
 I knew your suspicions were false
 Shall we go and see the shawl?
 But hark! the bugle calls
 And the auspicious moment for the festival
 Cannot wait, so let us depart
 I hope my aim is sure to-day
 And my arrow pierces the heart."

Nongban then said not a word
 But looked at Thoibi and smiled
 And Thoibi trembled at his smile
 Never was a look so defiled
 With cunning malice. He did not press
 Her father to see the shawl
 For Thoibi had not lied in this
 She was weaving it, he knew all.
 But he also knew that Thoibi's word
 Would always count before his
 So he silently slunk away
 Like a snake with a serpent's hiss.

And Thoibi knew Khamba had the shawl
 Next to his heart, she prayed
 Her father may forget all about it
 So that they may be saved.

Now Nongban served the King, Khamba
 Served the Yuvaraj and so
 When after the King it was Yuvaraj's turn
 To stand and take his bow
 Khamba knelt to give the arrows
 Nengban came and stood
 Very close to Khamba and watched for the shawl
 His eyes keen as a rukh

And as he noticed one end of it
 Showing below the waist,
 He swiftly pulled it with his toes
 With a magician's haste,
 And stood with his foot pressed on it
 While Yuvaraj took his aim
 It loosened and fell at Yuvaraj's feet
 As Khamba ran to see the aim.

Nongban smiled and looked at Yuvaraj
 And then his smile and look
 Meaningly travelled to the fallen shawl
 The Yuvaraj followed his look and shook
 With sudden fury and rage at him
 Who had made his daughter lie
 He cursed him and muttered with hoarse breath
 "By God ! This dog shall die !"

And as poor Khamba returned to say
 The Yuvaraj had missed the mark
 He saw the Yuvaraj shoot at him
 As if some madness stark
 Had seized him.

Khamba tried to dodge and skip
 The flight of arrows aimed at him
 But when he saw the shawl he guessed
 He must now face ruin.

For Nongban's smile was more deadly and sure
 Than the arrows shot in blind rage
 He thought of Thoibi for he could see
 Sheer destruction in his gaze.

But the king intervened and asked the Yuvaraj
 What caused his anger, he said
 "Our kindness to this youth from the hills
 Has strengthened the brute, he led

Our daughter astray, you see this shawl
 Made by Thoibi for me ?
 It's been taken by this wily thief
 Who shall now get his fee !"

King :— "Ah ! calm your anger he's but a lad
 And Thoibi but a child,
 She may have given it as reward
 For his courage wild.
 It hardly befits you to kill him thus
 Unarmed and all alone
 A lad with supernatural strength
 So let your heart condone
 His fault, for he did expose his life
 When our Nongban had prophesied
 Our lands shall perish and rot with strife,
 It was Khamba who eased
 Our minds and caught the fierce red bull
 The boy can mean no harm,
 Come, let him go and ease you mind
 From childish false alarms."

The King went away, the Yuvaraj *
 Though silent before the King
 Gave a sly signal to Nongban
 Who quickly formed a ring
 Round Khamba as he meekly knelt
 Before Yuvaraj to beg his pardon
 Nongban's men caught him unawares,
 Bound him and made a cordon.

Thoibi ran down when she heard this
 To her father and fell at his feet,
 She implored him with piteous tears in her eyes
 To let his anger mete
 Any punishment for her ; she cried,

Thoibi :— “Oh ! beat me, kill me, stone me to death
 For it was I who lied.
 Let not my sin kill others
 Let them not say you had
 Not given punishment where it was due
 And killed an innocent lad
 To save your daughter though you knew
 It was she and not he who had
 Sinned against you. You know sire
 It's your daughter who is bad
 So spare Khamba he's innocent
 And kill me if you must
 Or forgive us both and if you can't
 You can at least be just.”

The Yuvaraj tried to jerk his foot
 But Thoibi hung on and cried
 As she was dragged by his pull
Thoibi :— She said “It was I who lied
 Forgive him, father, punish me
 It is your daughter who lied.”

The Yuvaraj smitten with remorse
 And the shame of his daughter's words
 Dizzy with conflicting emotions
 For truth it is that hurts ;
 Saw Nonghan watching his defeat
 And thought he'll not weaken in wrath.
 His mind adaze he thundered.

Yuvaraj :— “I will smother both flame and moth.
 My wrath shall not lack in justice .
 I shall banish you from my sight
 You shall be exiled to Burma
 And Khamba shall meet the might

Of our wild elephant, and we'll see
If his courage and his strength
Can withstand our wild Elephant
It'll be sport till his life is spent.
Go ! take them away from my sight to meet
Their own respective fate.
"Yeeyah ! Why do you stand Nongban ?
Command your men, I hate
Delay in my orders. Quick ! obey,
I have nothing more to say."

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So Thoibi was sent to Burma
Where she was to live in exile
With a letter to the King of Burma
To treat her as his child.

The Burmese King was a friend
Of the King of Moirang, Yuvaraj thought
He could teach his daughter a lesson
Without any hazardous loss.

Khamba was thrown in the elephant's ring
To be stampeded and killed by him
But they knew not that this elephant
Had really been like a twin
Brother to Khamba when they were young
For the Naga chief who had
Presented this elephant to the king
Had reared Khamba a lad
At the same time as the elephant
Whom the Naga had caught as a babe
And so they had played together
And often together laid
On the hay in the barn of the elephant
In a frosty winter night
When Khamba had snuggled close to him
To get warmth from his hide.

So as poor Khamba faced him now
Bound in ropes to die
The elephant smelt him and shrieked with joy
Lifting his trunk to the sky.
Khamba recognised him too and breathed
A sigh of freedom and relief

He loosened the rope by elephant's tusk
And in the darkening eve
He freed his hands and climbed his neck
And under cover of dusk
He led him on to the sty and said
"I must go to her, I must."

The elephant raised him on his trunk
And dropped him over the fence
Khamba found the road to Burma
And was lost in forest dense.
And no one knew the miracle
Of Khamba's release and where
The boy was now in hiding
For who on earth could dare
The mysterious powers of destiny
And what her will was yet to be.

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In the misty moon-lit night
When silence with loneliness roamed
Through sleepy boughs and hanging creepers
Wrapped in each others' arms and owned
By dreams, Thoibi sat pale and wan
As pale and wan as the moon
In the dull and misty sky
Sleeping to the silent tune
Of night's long soothing lullaby
Which puts the world in a swoon.

Her eyes were open, her lips had drooped,
Her head lying limp on her neck ;
Her hands like the boughs of the tree
Lay inert and motionless
On her lap like helpless hope,
A hope paralysed, its breath,
Coming slowly and going silently
Waiting not for life but death.

And in this silent stillness
A faint note of a flute vibrates
Her breath comes faster and faster
Her heart palpitates and shakes
"It cannot be" whispers Thoibi
"Oh ! but it is—it is !
It's his flute that pierces the darkness
And fills this stillness with bliss."

Suddenly the whole world comes to life
In a thousand voices the silence speaks
The cricket, the linnets and the breeze

All now seem to come and greet
 This melody. This soft call to life,
 This call to hope and love
 Makes all life lift up its head
 And even the heavens above
 Awaken and smile, it seems the stars
 Do twinkle with new sheen
 The moon bends and parts the misty veil
 To see what at this hour seems
 To raise a dawn in the realm of night
 And fill it with meledy.
 The strains of the flute now fill the air
 Like the scent of the Malati
 Which sways in the breeze and drops her flowers
 As an offering to this unseen
 God of Music, love and life,
 The fullfiller of all dreams.

Thoibi rushes to this call
 She now needs no path, no way
 The notes of the flute floating to her
 Beckon to her and say
 "Come my love I come to thee
 No stones and no darkness dense
 Can bar our way for we must meet
 Our love needs no defence
 For it is immortal. Come blend with me,
 And leave all else to fate
 Our love is ours this moment
 So let the future wait."

She rushed to Khamba and fell in his arms
 Her tears bathed her fatigue.
 The night was filled with silence again
 But for their heart beats.

Khamba :—“Come away with me and let us go
 Beyond these hills some where
 Where we can live unknown, unowned ;
 Believe me my love can dare
 To face all we may have to face
 Come darkness is our friend
 Do not be afraid of fears my love
 They are but shadows that bend
 And break with the light of true love
 And I fear not death for life
 Without you, bereft of living,
 Is like a blunted knife
 Which kills not but leaves a festering wound
 Oh ! what is there to live?
 I do not want life, I only want love
 Which you alone can give.”

Thoibi :— “I am yours my love for you are my
 Eyes, my heart, my breath.
 My body, my soul, my thought, my blood,
 My smile, my tears, my life, my death.
 So I am afraid to lose you now
 Oh ! no ! love, not ever again
 We are between Burma and Manipur.
 And here let us remain.
 Let the hours of our love be short but sure
 For if we now take flight
 There are two forces that follow us
 We'll be caught between their might.
 Oh ! let us not dare our love so soon
 Even before it met
 But wait a while with each sunrise
 There must be a sunset.
 No one but these trees, these stars, this moon
 Know and no one shall know

The night is kind, in her darkness
Our love shall live and grow.
And though the days will be long
The night will smile and wait.
And oh ! my love just think of it
My heart's already in spate.
Hush ! not a word more, just let me breath
Oh ! let my parched thirst sip
Of your wine while we commune
With our souls, our eyes, our lips."

The night was soft and Thoibi's warmth
Melted in Khamba all thoughts.
The moment was theirs and theirs alone
The moment through ages sought.

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The Yuvaraj had not smiled since the day
He had banished his daughter Thoibi.
And though he tried to cover his grief
With arrogance the world could see
Dark shadows of repentance lurk in his eyes
But his stubborn pride disdained
To own how his dreams tormented him
And how affection pained.

He would sit gloomy and silent for hours
With a heavy and stubborn frown
Rubbing his hands to crush the love
Which sneered and jeered at his crown
For in his dreams he had heard his child
Call out to him again and again
With a voice so piteously sad, her tears
Falling on him like rain.

So when Thoibi's mother went to the King
And begged for her daughter's return
He feigned a casual nonchalance
Though his eagerness did burn
To hear the King order his knight and say
"Bring Thoibi back again"
For he would then get an excuse
To free himself from shame.

The King at once called Nonghan
And ordered him to leave
Immediately for Burma
For Thoibi's release.
He wrote a letter to the King
And put on it his seal

At this the palace inmates
Could not their joy conceal.

And though the Yuvaraj averted his eyes
He could not stop his face
Relaxing in each muscle,
His frown was now erased.

The palace was expectant and full of life
Her maids were hysterical with joy
As if the sun had burst the clouds
To gloom and darkness destroy.

And as the maids watched Nongban leave
They started counting the days
When they may hear her voice again
And see her gentle face
Smile on them. "Oh ! the gods be praised
And may long live our King
For by his grace we'll find again
The joyous rippling spring
Of Thoibi's laughter and loving ways
Which with happiness fill our days."

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Nongban had camped on the boundary line
On the bank of the river Ningthi
He was dreaming dreams of fulfilment
As he waited for Thoibi.
For he had sent the palanquin
And his men with the letter from the King
Four days ago and to-day he knew
The palanquin would bring
His heart's ambition and eye's delight.
Ah ! Thoibi would now sing
To him her songs, for very soon
Our wedding bells will ring.
And Khamba shall now wed his doom
And hide in jungles and die
Like a wounded animal
His every breath a sigh.

He was getting impatient, the sun now lay
Behind the hills and soon
It would get dark, for to-night
There was to be no moon.
He stood up and screwed his eyes to scan
The path by which she'll come
Yet there was no sign of the palanquin
Though the day was nearly done.

At last the messenger he had posted came
Running to him to say
He'd seen the palanquin turn round the bend
They were heading now this way.

Nongban got excited and he asked
For a mirror to be brought to him

He redid his hair and turban
 Then gave his servant a grin
 Wanting a comment of appraisal from him
 The servant bowed and said

Servant :—“Never have I seen a handsomer man
 And never will I, till I’m dead.”

And vain Nongban puffed up with pride
 Put an orchid on his ear
 Then scented himself profusely
 As he saw her come near.

He marched in pomp to welcome her
 When he brought her to the camp
 He laid out a feast of fruits and flowers
 On the river bank.

But Thoibi would have neither flower nor fruit
 She said she was not well.

The swaying palanquin had upset her
 And nothing but quiet could quell
 This dizziness she felt in her head,
 So if his Lordship would leave
 Her alone to rest just for an hour
 She will try to please
 His humour. Nongban readily rose
 To leave her alone for a while
 But hastened to put his guard round her
 In case there was some guile.

Thoibi sat still and strained her ears
 To hear a note of the flute
 Which would mean Khamba was near
 And would meet her en the route.
 For she had slipped a note for him
 Under the stone at their meeting place

And he was sure to be there by the time
The sun had hid its face.

She had told him all and asked him to meet
Her quietly on the route
And play his flute but once for her
As a signal so she could recoupe
Her wits and give Nongban a dodge
Then run away with him
To face either life or death
For in either she could win
A heaven for her love. So she bided the time
And thought of some possible plan
By which she could fool Nongban's power
And outwit him if she can.

She noticed Nongban had only one horse
And all his guards were on foot
For she was to go in the palanquin
Oh ! God if she could only put
On a bewitching smile for him
On her face and ask for the horse
Nongban flattered would not refuse
So she had to some how force
Her lips to smile, her cheeks to blush
Her eyes to say she willed,
Or she has no chance to live
With all desires killed.

Ah ! there it was ! the strain of the flute,
Like a streak of lightening in the sky.
She rose to go to Nongban
And asked the reason why.
They should delay, the evening was clear
The sky was blue and they
Could easily travel even by night

And cross over half the way.

Thoibi :— “This is our land, each village, each path
 Would welcome us and bow ;
 What fear has Nongban with all his power
 And his men with torches, how
 Could any danger dare to rise
 Before the mighty Nengban ?
 I can hardly wait when our home lies
 So very near at hand.”

Nongban was touched by the word ‘our’
 And bewitched by the smile she gave
 He said “Of course if it be your will
 It will long waiting save.
 He ordered “Come ! bring the palanquin,
 The camp can follow behind”
 And then he said smiling
 “Indeed our princess is kind.”

Thoibi :— “Oh ! please, not the palanquin again
 I have but just got rid
 Of my dizziness, so would you mind,
 Oh ! please do order and bid
 Your men to get me your own horse
 For but a mile or two
 Till I tire myself riding
 And hand it over to you.
 As you walk beside me I shall feel
 So honoured, so safe and so genteel.”

Nongban :—“With pleasure Princess Thoibi it’s a delight
 To walk holding the reins of your horse
 Through this starry night ; Hay ! you !
 Come on, bring over the horse.
 To-day our Princess Thoibi shall ride

My horse this enchanting eve.
 Hurry man ! bring it quick this side
 For home-land now we leave."

He helped Thoibi to mount the horse
 And led her on with care
 Thoibi quickly threw down her ring
 And muttered with a scare.

Thoibi :— "My ring ! Oh ! Nongban, it's there you see
 It's now become so loose
 And yet it is too precious
 For poor Thoibi to lose.
 Please pick it up for me, will you ?"
 She said smiling into his eyes.
 Oh ! how her love had forced her
 To utter such glittering lies !

He went for the ring and Thoibi
 Whipped her horse to run
 Nongban stunned could hardly believe
 That the act was done !

He thought it was his own horse
 That had shied and run away
 With a stranger on its back
 He yelled to his men to stay
 And stop the brute, but it was too late.
 He saw a shadow leap on his back
 Though he knew what that shadow was
 He was powerless to attack.

And dust off the horse's hooves
 Soon veiled them from his sight
 And Nongban was left lamenting
 With all his power and might.

The Royal household waited impatient
For Thoibi's return.

And looked from the palace balcony
If their eyes could discern
Nongban's party coming this way :
Yuvaraj was now most prone
To see his beloved daughter
Came back safely home.

Thoibi's maids and girl friends
Had woven flower braids
Of choicest blooms and fragrant scents
To decorate the gates.

According to the expected schedule
She should have reached by noon
But all this expectant excitement
Had got ready too soon !

The sun was now high and shadows,
Lay stunted neath the walls
Of the gates where they stood and watched
And listened for the conch calls,
Which would herald Thoibi's return
They wished the hours would fly
In their eagerness they kept sprinkling the flowers
So they may not wilt and die.

The shadows lengthened the sun came down,
And was sliding behind the hill
The flowers had wilted with their joy
But there was no Thoibi still.

At last they saw the palanquin
 Swaying slowly on the way
 And they breathed a sigh of relief
 At least she had come to-day.

They all rushed out to meet her,
 When the palanquin was put down,
 The Yuvaraj raised the curtains
 But his smile turned to a frown !

Yuvaraj :—“What joke is this ? What does this mean ?
 Nongban ! you will die for this.
 Where is my daughter ? what detained her ?
 I thought there was something amiss.
 But by my God, I'll murder you
 You parted her from me
 Oh ! speak man ! or are you dumb
 Where is my daughter Thoibi ?”

Nongban :—“My lord, I would you'd kill me
 For I do not wish to live
 The stars are against me but in sooth
 There is nothing for you to forgive.
 Oh ! Sire it was not my fault
 Believe me sire, it's true
 Ask any man of the party you sent
 I shall live to rue
 My folly in my love for Thoibi
 Which made me turn a fool
 And all my affection and loyalty
 Was used by her as tool
 To clear her way. Khamba the brute
 Has instilled his cunning in her
 She asked for my horse, I gave it
 She whipped it and galloped sir
 Before I could even pick up her ring

Which she had dropped intentionally
 I saw the horse fly off with her
 Faster than the eye could see.
 I am ashamed sire that a little girl
 Could thus make a fool of me
 I'm ashamed, my pride is torn to bits
 But sire ! I am not guilty."

"Rise"! said Yuvaraj and turned his face
 For he could not hide the smile
 To see proud Nongban besmudged with shame
 By the wit of his spirited child.

As time had passed his wrath for Khamba
 Had abated and cooled away
 His mind said he was a brave and handsome lad
 High born too, if he could sway
 Poor Thoibi's heart it was no surprise
 For he had heard people say
 Khamba was a youth who could challenge
 Any one any day.

He was a boy the like of whom
 They had never seen before
 He was a hero of their hearts
 And if he had not been sore
 About the shawl, he admired him
 And honoured his courage and strength
 Though Nongban too had served him well
 And had taken pains at length
 He lacked in something Khamba had.
 Though he is strong and rich
 There is that something about the lad
 And yet he is poor, this hitch
 Had always over shadowed his clear sight
 So he preferred Nongban to him

Why not challenge them to a duel
 And then who could finally win—
 But Nongban interrupted his chain of thought
 As though he had read his mind

Nongban :—He said “let me fight a duel
 If I could Khamba find
 I'll die or kill him once for all
 And end this endless strife
 For I tell you sire, this last defeat
 Has cut me like a knife.”

Yuvvaraj :—“Let us take the matter to the King
 I do think the offer is fair.
 There's no need to hunt for Khamba
 If we proclaim this, he's sure to dare
 Your challenge to him and come out
 To meet you with fair play
 For whatever may be the poor lad's faults
 His heart is not of clay !”

But as they were discussing this with the King
 They heard some people cry
 And moan bewailing some dear loss
 As if some one had died.

They were given audience by the King
 They related a very sad tale

Villager :—“A young little girl, a widow's child
 Had gone to the woods without fail
 To gather some wood for her mother
 But this day to the wood as she went
 She was waylaid by a tiger
 And so her life was spent
 Ere she had lived ten summers
 And she was all she had

Poor woman still roams the forest wild
Calling out to her, she's mad.

This tiger had now since some time past
Been lifting our cattle and hens
But now he's become a man-eater
We fear for our life and hence
We come to you, our King, our Lord
To save us from such death
And have the tiger hunted and killed
We will bless you with each breath."

The old King had the duel in mind
And so at once he thought
It would be a waste of one brave life
In a vain duel, why not
Use courage and valour to some avail
And announce that out of the two
Nongban and Khamba who kills the beast
Will have the right to woo
Princess Thoibi for his bride.
May be it was so destined and this
Shall solve all our problems with grace
Fair play and justice.

He spoke to his people fondly and said
"My people your troubles and woe
Are mine and I will do my best
For you, so rest assured and go.
I'll have it announced that out of the two
Nongban and Khamba who kills
The tiger for my people is true
Knight to his King, who wills
To wed his princess to the man
Who shall give you peace.

Go to the woman who lost her child
And try to soothe and ease
Her grief and take this bag of gold,
Though no gold can ever feed
The gnawing hunger of her heart
It still can living ease.
Go now my people and depart
With hope for future in your heart.

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At night when Nongban was heavy with drinks
To drown his frustration, he broods and thinks
"This Khamba was born under a lucky star
However hard I try I cannot mar
His success in whatever he undertakes
It seems some evil spirit makes
His way easy and smooth for him
But if I this tiger's hunt begin
And forestall him in this, I'm sure to win.
I'm sure to win ! I'm sure to win !!
But—it's when I begin to win, I lose
It seems there's nothing left to choose
Wait ! I'll ask a sorcerer for some charm
So that the tiger cannot harm
Or touch a single hair of my head
And to his den I shall be led
By this charm much before Khamba
Even hears this announcement. Ah !
That's the way, yes that's the way.
Nongban yet shall see the day
When he can sit on this throne
With princess Thoibi as his own.

He shouted at his servant with false glee
Nongban :—"Yeyah ! get some wine and come with me
We have little time to lose you fool
But I must not get heated, I must keep cool.
No one has defeated Nongban, no one will
And it's Nongban who shall eventually kill
The tiger. Come, let us go to the sorcerer's den
The night is young, go call my men
From there straight to the jungle I go
To death or life, we all shall know."

But his servants puzzled stood still and gaped
Open mouthed, stupid like dumb apes.
This irritated Nongban who shouted with rage
Like a mad demon about to stage
His own destruction by the will
Of powerful destiny he could not still.

Nongban :—“Come ! come ! don’t stand and stare at me
How can I stop, what is to be ?”

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They went and the sorcerer tied a charm
On Nongban's hand to save him from harm
Then took the bag of gold and said
"The way is dense if your heart is led
By dark thoughts. Try to save
Yourself from your own evil. The charm I gave
Is to save you from the tiger, but sometimes hate
Does make ugly your own fate.
And sometimes your mind—but never mind
After all the gods are good and kind
Go, kill the tiger to save human life
Go, but beware of your own evil knife."

Nongban :—“Thanks venerable seer, I know my mind.
And my mind I believe knows me.
After all we were born together
We fit like lock and key !
And why should I fear my own mind ?
After all the gods are kind !
My mind is a present from the gods above
And in it I find
My god and myself, so you see
You've nothing to worry at all about me.

Oh ! You and your accursed charms !
But never mind, never mind.
My fate and I roam arm in arm
I can but pick up what I find.
But the tiger shall die like a wild cat.
You bet, I can take a bet on that.
Your charm makes me easy inside
I bet I'll bring you the tiger's hide.”

They left for the forest as the first streak
 Of red came on the sky
 And looked for the tiger pug marks
 To find out where he lies.

News travelled fast and met Khamba
 With the first rays of the sun.
 He was overjoyed to hear the news
 And to know that he had won
 The King's confidence and regard
 Oh ! he danced with joy and ran
 To tell Thoibi the happy news
 He could wed her if he can
 Kill this tiger. "Oh ! Thoibi, Thoibi" :
 He cried "we have loved like thieves
 Though love is love to all alike
 Yet this thought me did grieve
 And now I can go proudly to the King
 And claim you as my right
 Oh ! Thoibi my love I'll win you
 Can you imagine my delight ?"

Thoibi - "Yes ! * go my life and remember
 I live or die with you.
 Living thus with fearful stealth
 Was very irksome it's true.
 And if in my fate, my destiny
 I have more days to live
 You will kill the tiger
 May the kind gods give
 You the strength of ten lions
 My heart is without fear.
 Go ! my love I pray for you
 And if to the Gods I'm dear
 You will return a victor to me

And then the world shall see
My Khamba as my eyes see him
Glorious in victory."

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The whole day Nongban traced his prey
But of the beast there was no sign
At dusk Khamba had reached the spot
And Nongban had to resign
To fair play. They lit the torches
And Nongban's men began to beat
The jungle to drive the tiger to him
While Khamba had come alone to meet
And kill the tiger and by this time
The King, Yuvaraj and their men
Had settled themselves on high Machans
Made specially for them.

Nongban was surrounded by his men
Khamba stood alone and tense
With his eyes sharper than arrows
A spear for his defence.

The din and the noise in the darkness
With torches dancing about
As if on their own in the jungle
Were looking weird — a shout
“The tiger!” A growl, and then the leap
And as Nongban turned to look
He was thrown back by the beast
Who mauled him as he took
Nongban's left hand in his mouth
While he wriggled with pain
And tried to cut off his own left hand
To some distance gain.

But as he raised his sword the beast
Thinking it was for him

Growled and leapt over his body
 And then tried to pin
 His teeth in to his shoulder
 And Nongban had no chance
 To free himself of the tiger
 But Khamba threw his lance
 And hit the tiger who turned to look
 At this new danger and growled
 And left his prey to fight anew
 Wounded, his temper foul !
 Khamba took him on with nimble skill
 And watched out for his chance
 To strike his spear into his heart
 While the tiger made him dance
 He leapt higher than the tiger
 He skipped, he slipped, he ran
 And all the while he egged him on
 Measuring his life span.

Nongban was pulled away by his men
 Who lay him aside to rest.
 They gave him water and dressed his wounds
 And tried to do their best.

But Nongban's eyes though dull with pain
 Were glued on Khamba's face,
 He watched every step he took
 With confidence and with grace.

He knew he was dying but he also knew
 That Khamba had tried to save
 His life though he was his rival
 And this knowledge gave
 More pain than the wounds he suffered,
 More than his ebbing life

And then he knew what the seer had meant
By "beware of your own knife."

This pain of humiliation
Was worse than any defeat
He knew now he was not even fit
To seek pardon at Khamba's feet.

It was his own evil that killed him
Stabbed him in the back
He was no good—he was evil
This truth like a staggering smack
Shook him; but he thought he'll wash his shame
And try to make his death
Condone for the sins of his life
He'll rise with his last breath!

The King was watching the fight and he
Sent his men with torches for Khamba to see
The wild beast as clearly as the tiger saw him
The beaters again began their din.

The jungle was dense, the fight was grim
The tiger got angry, leapt high at him
And that gave Khamba the very chance
He had been waiting for to pierce his lance
Just below the left shoulder into his heart
The beast fell down and gnawed the dart.

Then Khamba speared him once again
He growled in temper and rolled with pain
And when the beast lay quiet and still
The crowd gathered to see the kill.

The Naga chief, his foster father
Shouted with full joy wild

"Khamba has killed the tiger
Oh, my brave boy ! Oh, my child."

He rushed down from the tree top
From where he stood and watched
To see the fight and to know
If Khamba had forgotten all he'd taught
To kill a ferocious foe.

He embraced him and swung him round with pride.
Khamba bent and touched his feet.
And tears ran down both their eyes
Tears of joy to greet
Khamba's victory—fulfilment of hope
A hope long cherished by them both.

The King came down with the Yuvaraj
And as Khamba to kneel down bent
The King fondly raised him and said,
"Not now Khamba, your victory has sent
You now as my own son-in-law
You'll never bend my son
Oh ! I am so proud of you
The Gods be praised, you won."

King :—

Nengban called Khamba
And tried to rise
He wanted to meet him
And apologise
For all evil actions, all evil thought
By his foul jealousy begot.
And so before he met his end
He earnestly wished to make amends
And face death without bitterness
Or resentment at Khamba's success.
And Lo ! the miracle of good thoughts !

He really felt happy and at ease
 His handsomeness which was malice smeared
 Now looked noble, and calm with peace.

Khamba went to Nongban and knelt by him
 He was feeling embarrassed he could win
 While proud Nongban shamed, now wounded lay
 Defeated. He didn't know what to say.

But Nongban looked at him and smiled
 And said "so you won, good gracious child !
 You're too good, you can't even be
 Vain and proud of your own victory.
 God bless you Khamba and make your heart
 Generous enough to forgive
 My selfish jealousy ere I depart.
 And even if I live
 May I have you for a friend
 Till I reach my journey's end ?

Khamba was touched. He bowed his head
 And took Nongban's hand and said
 "Nongban, I have not words to say
 What I feel, I'm jungle bred.
 Yet there's a language of the heart
 Which I have known and read ;
 And this I know that in this world
 The most difficult to win
 Are one's own failings, and Nongban
 To own and admit one's sin.
 For the pride that bends for pardon
 Is the purest pride that lives
 And the man who repents is greater
 Than the man who just forgives !"

Nongban replied, "the people were right

You are godly, come give me your hand
 Sometimes one's actions and one's will
 Are so hard to understand.

Why did I wish you evil ?
 What had I to gain ?
 More than what I already had
 Except a kind of shame
 In possessing Thoibi against her will
 And filling her heart with pain.
 I, Nongban, who claimed to love
 Princess Thoibi should not refrain
 From hurting her and feel a kind
 Of joy as she suffered and cried
 Oh ! I'm a cad and I know it !
 It was better if I had died.

For by God I had lived my life
 Full, to my heart's content
 With wealth and power and so much love
 Yet my greed unspent
 Clamoured for more, I could not see
 My ugly greed and lust
 Was making an awful beast of me
 I only felt I must
 Fill this hunger, this thirst in me
 By foul means or fair
 And though it never eased my want
 I felt I must kill and dare
 Any thing or any one that thwarted me
 It all seems so foolish, so mad,
 Now that I face death and not life
 Oh ! how I wish I had
 Another lease of life to live
 As I now want to live

KHAMBA THOIBI

And try to undo all the wrongs
But fate never gives
Another chance—and perhaps
This too is only greed
For more, and yet more
To fill a heart
No better than a sieve.

Nay, it's enough that I shall now
Die with a kind of peace
A little sad and brooding
But it's a release.

Go ! commend me to the King
I'd like to take my leave
And confess to him before I go
How I tried to deceive
My own destiny, for all is well
Thank God inspite of me !
And I alone shall gladly bear
What ever waits for me."

So Khamba went and told the King
And Yuvaraj what Nongban said
They went to console him then bid their men
That Nongban should be led
In comfort back to his abode
Where royal physicians may go
To dress his wounds and do their best
To save his life and so
Ended the life of proud Nongban
After living five more days
He breathed his last with quiet peace
To remain with him always.

So Khamba and Thoibi were married
With rejoicing all around
When together they danced the nuptial dance
Before gods they were blessed and bound
In the sacred bonds of wed-lock
Forever and happiness
Rained on the palace while people showered
Flowers on them to bless
This love, this union which had defied
All obstacles and all might.
And in sooth they made a lovely pair
The sight was a delight.
She, beautiful, tender and fair like a flower
He, handsome and tall and strong
With noble bearing and meek grace
She with a smile that belonged
Not to earth but heavenliness
And combined they made a pair
On whom one could rest one's eyes and look
For hours in a trancy stare

Such bliss was their's that year after year
Slipped, unnoticed, and unfelt.
Such love as their's which neither time
Nor fulfilment could melt
Was not meant for mortals and jealous heavens
Could not see earth in bliss
So heavenly, they hastened fate
To steal life's blissful kiss.

Khamba, the eternal lover
Did not let his marriage dull

The waiting, the hope, the fear, the joy
 And time could not annul
 The flush of love, the excitement
 The nervousness, the thrill
 He did not let their happiness
 Lie still on them and kill
 The adventure of love and its youth
 So every now and then
 He would think of some prank, some practical joke
 To surprise Thoibi and when
 The joke was on they lived and loved
 With the same excited fervour as before
 And in the end they always found
 They loved each other more.

One day Khamba said to Thoibi
Khamba :— “I am going on a state errand
 It may take me long to return to you
 So look after yourself, I’ll send
 You my love through messengers
 But let not other eyes
 Feast on your beauty, it’s mine alone
 Or by this star on the skies
 I’ll kill myself and die one day.
 So let not your loneliness find
 Another but let it wait for me
 And keep me in your mind.
 Your Khamba shall return like the sun
 Back to you as his work is done.”

Thoibi laughed and then replied
Thoibi :— “My breath is tender as the scent
 Of a flower that blooms only by night
 And my heart is only meant
 To be loved and protected by your arms

So don't leave me and go away
 And if you must, then come back soon
 To my loneliness I pray."

Khamba went away and it was true
 He had some business to attend
 But it was only for a day,
 He had to go to help some friend.
 And when he returned the very next night
 He disguised himself and went
 At mid-night to knock at Thoibi's door
 And said Khamba has sent
 A letter for her and Thoibi disturbed
 From her deep sleep came to the door
 And opening it put out her hand
 For his letter and before
 She was fully awake he pulled her out
 And caught her tight in his embrace
 Thoibi bewildered tried to free herself
 And look into his face.

The night was dark and his disguise
 She could'nt recognise "
 She bit his arm and quickly pulled
 A dagger from inside
 Her jacket and before Khamba saw
 Or knew what she had done
 He felt a sharpness enter his heart
 And fell to the ground with one
 Gasp. And poor Thoibi heard him cry—
 "Ah ! Thoibi, Thoibi, Thoibi !
 It's your Khamba you stabbed to kill
 I never knew death could be
 So sweetly painful. It was God's will
 I meet my death like this

By love, knowing my love is true,
Death kills me with a kiss !

Ah ! my love it was destined.
Thus by your hand to die
Laying my body in love's embrace
My last breath a blissful sigh !"

Thoibi was stunned and petrified
Her eyes with horror wide
Looked on at Khamba as her ears
Heard and recognised
His voice. She kept repeating No ! No ! No !
Till Khamba spoke but as
He was silent she shrieked aloud
As if she had gone mad.
But with this shriek she came to life
She fell on him and said,
'Oh ! my love, my life, my God
Just wait till I am dead.
Ah ! let your last breath mingle with mine
Let us kiss but once again
Our last sip of love's pure wine
And then be free of pain."

She pulled the dagger from his wound
And thrust it in her heart
And fell upon him in an embrace
Never again to part.

And thus they lived in death again
Till they may find new life
With love's joys and love's pain
Through this eternity rife.

The End

POEMS ON MANIPUR

POEMS ON MANIPUR

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MANIPUR

The land of lotus ponds and hills
The land of flowers scattered wild
The land of gently scented breeze
The land of smiling seasons mild.

The land of rolling paddy fields
The land so rich in fruit and flowers
The land where beauty smiles with ease
In the green cool bamboo bowers.

The land of fresh eternal springs
Ever free from want and care
Where nature smiles on man and brings
Her bounty rich and fair.

The land which had once charmed the heart
Of Shiva the God of Gods
To dwell on its green and sumptuous hills
Is the land of many rewards.

The land of rhythm of motion and form
The land of music dance and song
The land of laughter full of spree
The land of plenty gay, carefree.

The land of Nagas on top of hills
With primitive valour might and will
Still reared and fondled in nature's lap
No time could yet their vigour sap.

The land where love lives free and fresh
 And does not pale and die
 Bound with conventions and distress
 Its life span free of lies !

The land where individual will prevails
 Where each man and woman's life
 Is shaped to suit their heart's desire
 Free of strain and strife

Where neither ambition nor gain or fame
 Bother the mind and peace
 Dwells in every village home
 Smoothly and with ease.

Where content and happiness abound
 Neath thatched roofs and green fields
 And simple joy for every one
 Is the harvest nature yields.

Where a smile on the lips and twinkle of the eyes
 Are not purchased by things
 But are reflected from the depths
 Of their own inherent spring.

Where woman does not have to lean on man
 But fends for herself with pride
 And man is his own master
 Both striding side by side.

Where glaring wealth does not sneer at man
 Where the apparel of all is the same
 Where all eat, dress, and live alike
 And the poor are not hurt with shame.

Where appalling buildings do not flaunt
Modest homes with modest means
But gorgeous nature spreads out her arms
For all to live and shelter their dreams.

So happiness dwells in all their hearts
Untouched, untarnished, free
A little green world all their own
Full of majesty.

Oh ! Life is not all joy and fun
It also has its knife
They love and laugh with free will
Inspite of its sorrows and strife.

This was the land of Manipur
The land where man is free
From greed of lust wealth and power
Ruled but by destiny.

But tentacles of mammon are drawing near
And he is trying to woo
The smile of these lips, the twinkle of these eyes
Will he get them in his grip too ?



THE TRIBAL WENCH

She was something like the tribal zu *
Her loveliness was ever new
For she was like the dawn,
Like each day new-born
That melts into the night
To wake up fresh and bright.
A vintage brewed of dew
With all the fires of the tribal zu.

She was some what like a song
A melody that haunts
The silent lake, the running brooks
The rivulet in shady nooks
That rustles through the ferns
Softly swaying as it turns
To hum a tune even to the thorns
Of lonesome cactus in wastes forlorn.

Her smile, her laughter and her frown
Did grace her like a floral crown
The merry twinkle of her eyes
Were like stars of dark blue skies.
She had the fragrance of the soil
Busy in her hazardous toil
Going through forests dark and grim
To fill her vessel from the spring.

* The tribal rice beer.

Frank as a flower, timid as a deer
 She laughed and ran without any fear
 Of man or beast, and I could hear
 Her voice so very soft and clear
 Singing of some secret dear
 Of some one very very near
 Her heart, for whom alone she pined,
 Every eve at sun-set time.

It was here bencath this pine
 She had met him the first time
 Firm and fair beside the brook
 Bending his bow, taut he stood
 The sunlight flickering through the leaves
 Danced on his form, his bosom heaved
 As he saw her turn and meet his gaze
 In stupefied wonder all amazed.

They stood and stared, and then he smiled
 She looked with awe at his beauty wild
 And saw some sparks leap in his eyes
 His, face was flushed, she heaved a sigh
 A sigh of longing and of fear
 Her heart was pounding, she could hear
 It beating in her ribs, her ears
 And yet she wasn't afraid of her fears.

She could not move, and she was hot
 What paralysed her, she knew not
 For this was strange, and yet still stranger
 Were the terrible looks of this handsome stranger
 Which opened some portals of her heart
 She could neither meet him nor depart,
 She recalled some tales she had heard told

Of love and lovers who had been told
 To fight for love, so they were killed
 As the wrath of the chief could not be stilled
 Till he drew the blood, and hung the head
 Of one who by stealth his daughter wed ;
 For he of a clan other than his own
 Must with his life's blood stone
 Or fight the chief and kill his men
 To prove the mettle of his strength,
 Then hang their heads on his door with pride
 Before he welcomes home his bride !

This handsome stranger was not her clan
 And so she knew she never can
 Wed him unless he's a powerful chief
 Who with mithuna or gifts can appease
 Her father who was a very proud chief
 And very powerful, so no thief
 Could ever steal anything, not even love
 Unless some miracle or gods above
 Helped them this would never be
 It was better if she turned back to safety

But warnings failed as they often do
 And nothing could ever separate the two
 Since the fateful day beneath the pine
 When they had their first taste of wine.

They stole their love in stealthy bliss
 And renewed their vows with every kiss
 The darkness covered them with her veil
 The trees pledged to relate no tale
 The brook murmured vows never to fail
 The Takhelei flowers scented the dale.

The orchids bloomed and smiled on love
 And the stars blessed them from above
 The moonbeams danced on their embrace
 While bliss was sleeping on their face.

Oft in the stillness of the night
 Animals prowled past their wild delight
 Intoxicated by love into recklessness
 They abandoned themselves to a blessedness
 Till even the darkness of the night
 Could not stay from bringing to light
 The love she hid in her heart all day
 For her dreamy silence did betray
 And the glow on her face, her sparkling eyes
 Betrayed her more than any spies.

Whole day she worked as in a dream
 Such glow on her face was never seen
 Her father's eyes were suspiciously keen
 To know from whence had come the sheen
 To her rustic innocence so lean
 That she roamed now like a Queen.
 And yet he eyed her with self pride
 She was no flower which one should hide
 And so one day as she served him zu
 He said "I must find a match for you
 Some chief whose gate has many heads
 To speak his valour deserves to wed

My lovely maid who's fair as a flower
 And strong as a cow to fill her bower
 With sons who will be brave and tall
 And she can weave them each a shawl
 In red, white and black, our clan stripes
 Which'll be the envy of many wives."

He laughed and fondly patted her head
Then rose to go, for all was said.

Her love was doomed to end in haste
And nothing now could change her fate
Her father the chief was strong and fierce
No pleading tears his will could pierce
And though she loved with all her heart
She must, she must yet bid him part
She'll save his life though her heart may die
And her life become just one long sigh.

And like the silent wail of the weeping willow
Which looks on its sorrow in the stream below
She'll rest her grief on her memory's pillow
Till her new born love is ripe and mellow
To bear with lonesome ache the strife
Which may stretch forth in her dreary life.

Then slowly and heavily down the hill
When darkness was creeping and all was still
And even the breeze had held its breath
At the sad silence of some approaching death
She descended her empty vessel to fill
Dragging her feet against their will.

She looked at the friendly ferns and pines
She looked at the flowering woodbines
Farewell ! Farewell ! whispered her eyes
Farewell to you and the starry skies
You sheltered my love, but alas my heart
Can't bear to see you when I must part
From him, my breath, my very life
My love, my laughter, and my light
My warmth, my glow, my throbbing pulse

My dream, my waking, and all else
 That was worth living for in me
 I must bid farewell to, and be
 Like the lone creeper torn off its tree
 That creeps into darkness to await
 The drab fulfilment of her fate.

The damp woods sighed, the woodbines hung their heads
 And the brook groaned on its sandy bed ;
 As she came nearer to its bank
 Dropping her vessel she just sank
 And all her poor blighted hopes
 Swooned as if by lethal dopes
 Lay before her helpless with no sound
 As she looked on with vacant eyes spell bound.

She started ! the blood rushed to her cheeks,
 He ! He was coming from behind the creeks !
 So tall so firm and so handsomely fair
 As if the Gods too he could dare
 His shoulders broad, his waist line slim
 His joints rounded, his footsteps trim
 The muscles of his arms and legs
 Moving in rhythm to his steps.

He mounted a rock and for her searched
 Narrowing his eyes and his hand jerked
 As he spotted her on her seat
 "Oh ! Laggong * now give me strength to meet
 His bright gladness with my dark sorrow
 To tell him we must not meet to-morrow.
 Ah ! that I should kill that happy smile
 And make his arrogant pride servile
 And yet I must or he will die

* A Naga God.

Oh Laggong ! give me strength and try
 To balm his wound, to mend his pride
 For I can never be his bride."

She told him all her fears and cried
 Her face was pale, her blood had dried
 Her mouth was dry and parched with fear
 To see his bright eyes darken and jeer
 At her piteous acceptance of defeat
 His mouth was set, she could hear the beat
 Of his strong heart pressed to her cheek
 As she clung to still her trembling feet
 While he held her tight in his embrace
 She with awe looked at his face.

At last he spoke. His voice was low
 Heavy and cool, his words were slow
 "A chief he wants ? Then a chief I'll be
 And by my soul one day you'll see
 For I shall rest not day or night
 Till I can establish my might
 And fifty mithuns will be at your door
 When I will pace your father's floor
 And heads will ornament my gate
 Much before the auspicious date
 And I will yet make you my wife
 No matter at what cost or strife.
 Till then pledge you your word to me
 That you'll remain a maid—I'll see
 You now as my bride, or never at all
 But ere the snow does three times fall
 I shall call you my wife or die
 And the heavens be witness if I lie.

Each day sit you by this pine.
 You see that three peaked mount ? that's mine,

And every eve I'll wait for you
 And wave a piece in red and blue
 And if you wave me back a cue
 I'll know you wait, your heart is true,
 Farewell my sweetness, my wife to be
 Thus honour bound I part from thee
 And though what ever will be, will be
 From my oath I'll never be free.

And you shall dwell so in my hoart
 That even death shall never part
 Or sever your image from my mind
 For you are in my soul entwined
 The haunting fragrance of your love
 Will drown the odour of the blood
 That I may shed to prove my worth
 So that your tears give birth to mirth
 And I hold you in my arms again
 Free from anguish, free from pain.

Ah ! for you even the fires of hell
 Shall be like the warmth of love my belle
 Farewell, adieu, Farewell adieu
 And do not fear, my love is true."

And since that day when they bid good-bye
 There was never a sad tear in her eye
 And each day their signals of love renewed
 Their hopes in their sweet land's pursuit
 And though parting was sad, this sadness smiled
 And their lonesome hearts beguiled
 And each winter as the new snow fell
 They felt closer, and who can tell
 What fate would bring them in its trend
 But while hope lingers, what matters the end !



LADIES MARKET

Ladies with their little lamps
All sitting in a row
Make a market for their goods
Of what they weave and grow.

Their bamboo trays display their wares
And baskets full of cloth
Woven in gorgeous designs
And colours that even moths
Would have been proud to wear
Flicker in flickering lights
Of their little oil lamps
And oh ! it's a delight
To see their radiant faces shine
As they talk and laugh and sell
Their labour for some metal coins.
And believe that all is well
On earth and heaven ; And their eyes
Twinkle without a care
Their wants are simple, what they have not
They do not want and dare
Strife and sorrow with their lamps
No darkness can darken their souls
Their smile is the smile of self-confidence
And the will to fill their bowls
With the joy life can give them
And there's really plenty in store
For them who know how to be happy
And do not ask for more.

And in this Ladies Market
Ladies of all ranks
Assemble together to sell their goods
They're not ashamed but swank
Their individual skill and talent
And have a friendly chat
In comradeship and good humour
Sitting on their straw mats.

And here as they earn their living,
Their independence, and their pride
They also hear the problems
And try to help and side
With those whom ill luck has shadowed
They try to raise a smile
Of hope and cheer with friendship
To pass over the while
Till they on their own can smile again
And look fate in the eye
For in this Ladies Market
There's a solace for every sigh.

I've never seen old age feel so young
So full of life and hope
So gay, so full of fun, so keen
To live while there is scope
For living. Their love of dance
And song can never die
While they live they love to live
And when they can't they die !



ON THE WAY TO TAMENGLONG.

In the cool dampness of pine wood's
Secretive darkness of the green
Entangled with swaying creepers wild
Flower-spangled by a winding stream
I sat to gain my breath and rest
After a strenuous climb
The way now lay by a level path
Shaded with woodbines.

The cricket's random chirping sounds
In sleepy silence dreamy cool
The ferns, the soft green velvet moss
On rounded stones beside the pool,
All combined to soothe my mind
And fill my body with restfulness
And a peculiar drunken feeling
Which I shall never forget.

The gentle quivering fragrant breeze
Caressed me as I lay
On scented softness of the pines
Gazing at clouds at play
In clear blue sky so smooth, so still
Peering through latticed green
On a carpet of lights and shadows
Neath majestic trees sereno.

It seemed in this soft silence
Eternity lay asleep

With all her past and future
In her slumber-deep.
And to me as I lay at that moment
Death seemed but an endless dream
Quiet, soothing and restful
Sprayed with cool moon beams.

Oh ! this blending of myself
With a mysteriousness dark and mild
Was a span of life relieved again
When the world was young and wild.



TO A NAGA WOOD SELLER

"From whence do you come
Oh ! slender one
Holding your tears in your eyes ?
Your bosom heaves
Each time it breaths
As if burdened with sighs.

What's the price of the wood on your back
Which bends you down with weight
Is it more dear than the smile fair one
Which might have lighted your face ?"

"Will you buy my burden ?" asked the maid
"The price is cheap and fair
It darkens my smile, but it shines my pride
As I straighten my back from care."

She put her burden down on the road
And looked me full in the face
And as I saw the pride in her eye
My luxury seemed disgraced !

Her rugged body, now straight and firm
Her forehead dauntless and wide
Her slit eyes seemed to make me burn
With what I could't decide.

It seemed as if her poverty had
A richness which I had not
It seemed she held same vital ligh
Which I had always sought.

And now relaxed she grinned at me
Her perfect teeth were white
Her slit eyes screwed up in happy mirth
Made all her weariness bright.

She pointed to the mountain top
Which held some huddled huts
Like the invincible force of some will
Which nature's wildness butts.

"That is my home", she said with pride
"I have two girls, two boys
My man — " she blushed a ruddy pink
Which spoke of untold joys.

She said no more being poor in words
But oh ! how rich, how rich !
And the emotion she had left unsaid
Was hard for me to pitch.

I saw how stupid pity could be
How foolishly proud and vain
Of such as me for such as her
Whom wants could never tame.

I laughed a dry and hollow laugh
And paid her for her wood
She took it and proudly walked away
While I looked on and stood,

Wondering at her indifference
To me and my sympathy
Wondering at her courage
Her superiority.

Her world was small and circled round
Her and her family
And she was content and happy
With what her lot must be!

Like a true child of 'Nirguna' God
With her primitive instincts alight
Unburdened with the sins of thought
Which breeds the wants of life

